

Numbers 20 - Thursday, October 21st, 2010

- Numbers 20 is a pivotal chapter in that we sort of round a corner now as near the end of the children of Israel's wilderness wanderings.
- We only have six chapters, from 15-19, that cover a period of about 38 years which, if you think about it, makes a lot of sense actually.
- There's not a whole lot to write about when God's people are walking in disobedience. Also, there's not a whole lot of anything really.

20:1a Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh;

- It's now the first month of the 40th year and they are back at Kadesh, which is where they were when they sent the spies into the land.
- I suppose you could say that this is a Déjà vu of sorts, in that this is the closest they got to the Promised-Land some 38 years prior.

1b ...and Miriam died there and was buried there.

- Now Miriam dies and is buried there in Kadesh. Moses will not only lose his older sister in this chapter, but his brother Aaron as well.
- While Miriam had done great things, what still marked her life was rebelling against Moses. Be that as it may, Moses still loved her.

"Here was a great sorrow for Moses. Except her one fault in once being jealous of her brother, she was a noble woman – a true princess and prophetess. Moses, no doubt, sorrowed greatly under the bereavement."

Charles Surgeon

2 Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.³ And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! ⁴ Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here?⁵ And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink."

- Talk about Déjà vu! What they accuse Moses and Aaron of, and complain about, is almost exactly what was said some 38 years prior.
- It's important to understand that this is the next generation, and at best, they were just kids or teenagers when their "brethren died."
- What makes this so interesting is that they learned this from their moms, dads, and aunties and uncles when they were still young.

6 So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them.

- Here again, Moses and Aaron also do what they did last time, and respond by falling on their faces before the Lord at the Tabernacle.
- Notice that when they fall on their face, then the glory of the Lord appears to them, and as we'll see next, the Lord speaks to them.
- Perhaps the lesson here becomes quite clear in the sense that when we humble ourselves before the Lord, we will hear from the Lord.

Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. NIV

7 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸ "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."⁹ So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him.

- The Lord tells Moses to take the rod, and gather the congregation, and "speak" to the rock so it will bring forth water for them to drink.
- So, Moses takes the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him, however, it's about to get really ugly, and go from bad to worse.

10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" ¹¹ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.

- Told you it was going to get ugly. Wow, what has happened to our Moses, the meekest man who ever walked on the face of the earth?

"Were they not wrong in calling the people rebels, and in saying 'must we fetch you water?' Certainly Moses erred in smiting the rock, for he was bidden to speak to it. The best of men are men at best."

Charles Spurgeon

- Moses is downright angry at the Israelites and is even calling them names. Then, he starts taking his anger out on the rock by striking it.
- By the way, the Greek word for "rebels" is "moros," which is where we get our English word "moron." Moses is calling them "morons!"
- Obviously, this is a colossal mistake, and as we'll see in the next few verses, it will also be a costly mistake for a number of reasons.
- There's even a reference to this disastrous sin on the part of Moses that's recorded in the book of Psalms, chapter 106:32-33.

Psalms 106:32-33 ³² By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them; ³³ for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips. NIV

12 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." ¹³ This was the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them.

- Ouch! I can't even begin to imagine how Moses felt when he heard the Lord say this to him. Oh how his heart must have just sunk!
- Perhaps you'll indulge me for just a moment, because I think that it is incumbent upon me to take a closer look at what's going on here.
- Here's why; Moses has been faithful in serving the Lord and leading the Israelites, and just because he loses his temper he's done?

- At first glance, this disqualification of Moses - may be seemingly disproportionate to the sin of anger that was committed by Moses.
- However, upon a closer examination, one finds just cause in what the Lord has meted out, in keeping Moses out of the Promised Land.
- First, Moses misrepresented God's nature, then he deliberately disobeyed God's command, and he exalted himself to God's power.

- His misrepresenting came when he became angry with the children of Israel implying that if Moses is mad then God must also be mad.
- His disobeying came when he struck the rock twice instead of speaking to it once implying that the "Rock" had to continually be smitten.
- His exalting himself came when he says; "Must 'we' bring water for you out of this rock" implying that he and Aaron are at par with God.

- It's as if God is saying; "Moses you deliberately disobeyed me, you blatantly misrepresented me, and you made yourself equal to me.
- This brings us back to our question which begs an answer; "Why would God disqualify Moses after walking so faithfully for 80 years?
- I believe the reason is chiefly because Moses ruined the typology as it relates to Jesus Christ Who was the Rock that was smitten once.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. NIV

- The thought here is that Jesus, as the Rock, was smitten only once when He was crucified on the cross for the sins of all mankind.

Hebrews 10:10-12 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. NIV

- Now, we can talk to Him and ask for the Holy Spirit from Him, to fill us to overflowing so our lives become torrents of living water.

Luke 11:9-13 9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" NIV

John 4:10 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." NIV

John 7:37-39 37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." NIV

- I suppose one take away from this is that the sin of misrepresenting God as being angry has to be taken with the utmost seriousness.
- Also, obedience to God, especially for those in positions of leadership, is an absolute must especially when we don't understand why.
- Another lesson that can be learned from this is that those in positions of leadership will be held to a much higher account before God.

James 3:1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. NIV

- Be that as it may, at least for me anyway, one of the most powerful lessons is how we are all prone to fail in areas of greatest strength.
- For Moses to do this, at this time and in this way, sobers me in that his meekness and his patience were his greatest areas of strength.

1 Corinthians 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! NIV

Unguarded strength is double weakness because that is where the "retired sphere of the leasts" saps. The Bible characters fell on their strong points, never on their weak ones. "Kept by the power of God" - that is the only safety.

Oswald Chambers, "My Utmost for His Highest" (April 19th)

- Moses is not alone in this; actually he's in very good company, because the scriptures are replete with the failures of great men of God.
- King David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, a man after God's own heart, falls with lust in his heart for Bathsheba, then, murders Uriah.
- The Apostle Peter, courageous enough to walk on water then take on the Roman army, denies Jesus as a coward before a servant girl.

- We know that failure won't have the final word in Peter's life, nor Moses' life because God is both merciful and gracious to restore them.
- It's interesting to note how God was still faithful to allow Moses to see the Promised Land, and at the transfiguration enter it with Jesus.
- Also, it's important to know that God, in his mercy, was still faithful to provide the water from the rock in spite of what Moses had done.

14 Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, 15 how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. 16 When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. 17 Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.'"

- Now we round another corner after all that's happened, and we see Moses sending a message from Kadesh to the King of Edom.
- He requests passage through the land of the Edomites, who are actually the fraternal cousins of the Israelites as descendants of Esau.
- We'll see the king of Edom's response in the next verse, but I want to first draw your attention to something I find absolutely remarkable.

- Notice that Moses is still being faithful even after the unspeakable disappointment of not being allowed to enter the Promised-Land.
- This is so remarkable because it's so rare. It really rare to find one with a mature strength of character to remain faithful when told no.
- In my years as a pastor on the mainland, I had watched so many people leave a church because they couldn't do what they wanted.

- There's something else here that is very interesting; notice that Moses only asks for passage, but does not ask for any provision.
- This would indicate that Moses is not only remaining faithful in his service to God, he is also remaining faithful in his trust in God.
- In other words, Moses though denied entry into the Promised-Land, still trusts in the goodness of both, Who God is and how God is.

18 Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword." 19 So the children of Israel said to him, "We will go by the Highway, and if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing more." 20 Then he said, "You shall not pass through." So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand. 21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.

- This had to have added insult to injury, because now they will have to travel for a much longer time and in a more dangerous way.
- Be that as it may, they will continue on in spite of the unspeakable hardship and the brutal rejection of their fraternal brothers.
- Needless to say, this is even more evidence of the faithfulness of Moses to continue on as well in spite of being so close, yet so far.

22 Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. 23 And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: 24 "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. 25 Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; 26 and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered to his people and die there." 27 So Moses did just as the LORD commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. 28 Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. 29 Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

- How sad is this? What a sad chapter. If you're anything like me, you're sort of grieving along with Moses and the children of Israel.
- This not only brings an end to a chapter in the book of Numbers, it also brings an end to a chapter in the life of the children of Israel.
- This is exactly what God said would happen. Their unbelief cost them the Promised Land and that they would all die in the wilderness.

- Actually, there's more typology here, and in fact, it can answer for us as to why it is that Moses, Miriam and Aaron could not enter in.
- See, Moses, is a type of the law, Miriam is a type of the prophets, and Aaron is a type of the priests, none of whom could lead them in.
- It had to be "Joshua," which transliterated is "Yashua," in the Hebrew language or Jesus in our language. Only Jesus can lead us in.

- Before we close, I want to suggest something that really hit me as I was completing my study of this chapter related to all Moses lost.
- Think about this; Moses has lost his big sister Miriam, his big brother Aaron, and to make things worse, he's also lost the Promise-Land.
- Here's what I'm thinking; "sometimes God will remove from us, before He removes us so as prepare us for what He's prepared for us."